

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Nebraska Bird Review

Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

6-2016

***The Second Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas*, Wayne J. Mollhoff,
Bulletin of the University of Nebraska State Museum, Vol. 29,
2016 [book review]**

W. Ross Silcock
silcock@rosssilcock.org

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebbirdrev>



Part of the [Ornithology Commons](#), [Poultry or Avian Science Commons](#), and the [Zoology Commons](#)

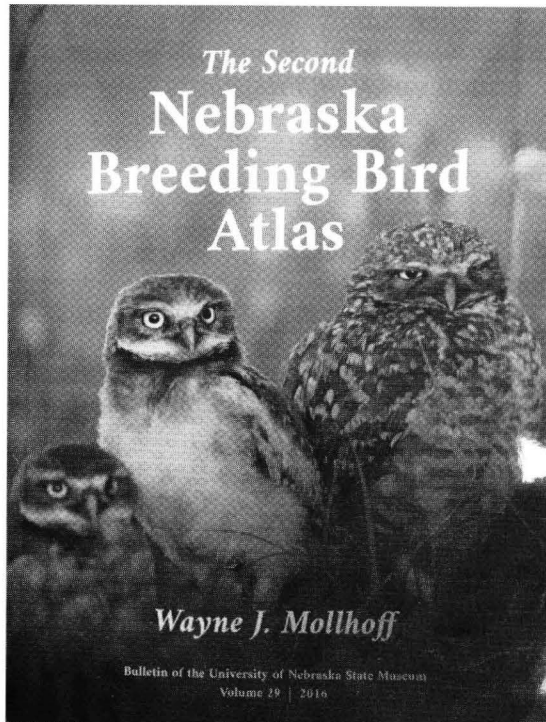
Silcock, W. Ross, "*The Second Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas*, Wayne J. Mollhoff, Bulletin of the University of Nebraska State Museum, Vol. 29, 2016 [book review]" (2016). *Nebraska Bird Review*. 1401.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebbirdrev/1401>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Nebraska Bird Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Second Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas, Wayne J. Mollhoff
Bulletin of the University of Nebraska State Museum, Vol. 29, 2016

Reviewed by W. Ross Silcock
PO Box 57, Tabor, Iowa
Co-author, *The Birds of Nebraska*, Sharpe et al. (2001)
Compiler, Seasonal Reports for Nebraska Bird Review
Co-Editor, Southern Great Plains Region, North American Birds

As suggested by its title, this book ("Second Atlas") presents the results of a follow-up to the first Nebraska breeding bird atlas, *The Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas 1984-89*, ("First Atlas"), also authored by Wayne Mollhoff. In this Second Atlas, Mollhoff acknowledges the foresight of John J. Dinan, Nongame Bird Program Manager at Nebraska Game and Parks Commission during the time of the First Atlas, in working towards a "follow-up project". As Mollhoff says in the Foreword to the Second Atlas, "His persistence in pursuing that goal ultimately led to the current project". The Abstract for the Second Atlas includes this comment: "Overall, the project demonstrated the need for recurring projects to help track changes that may not be detected [by other methods]".



There are quite a number of things I like about this Second Atlas, notably its author, Wayne Mollhoff, who has studied and compiled data on Nebraska's breeding birds for at least 40 years. His attention to detail has resulted in a comprehensive snapshot of Nebraska's breeding birds; the snapshot may actually be more akin to a video, in that the project lasted 6 years, as did the first. I was a bit baffled when I attempted to look up the actual years that the Second Atlas project took place; unlike the First Atlas, the cover of the Second Atlas does not specify the years involved. I had to search through the introductory chapters until I came across this on page 20: "During the first half

of the project (2006-2008).....". Thus I assume the Second Atlas encompassed the years 2006-2011.

But this is a minor point, now that we all know when the project took place! The Second Atlas is an attractive book printed on glossy paper and with a wonderful front cover of a family group of Burrowing Owls photographed by Michael Forsberg, and another great scenic shot on the back cover that looks to be of Red Cloud Buttes near Fort Robinson, but is not captioned.

The best feature of the Second Atlas is the presentation of the distributional maps for both atlases in each species account. This juxtaposition allows the reader to visually detect with ease changes in ranges of the species and the density of occurrence during the time that passed between the two projects. Because the First Atlas explored 443 survey blocks and the Second Atlas 557, statistical analysis of the comparative results is "problematic", as noted by the author. However, in most of the interesting numerical comparisons made between the two projects, Mollhoff included only the 443 atlas blocks that were part of both projects. The results of these comparisons are, in my opinion, the key information provided in the Second Atlas. In addition, Mollhoff provides some context for these comparison results by relating them to data from the United States Geological Service Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). The reader will find many fascinating nuggets of information in the 443-block comparisons regarding "frequency" of occurrence (percentage of blocks in which a species was found) and range (number of counties in which species was found). The range comparison uses all 557 blocks of the Second Atlas in its comparisons, which is acceptable in a spatial analysis.

Mollhoff suggests three categories of population change as revealed by the comparison data: directional shift, apparent population increase, and apparent population decline. I found the comparison data from the number of counties in which a species occurred to be a bit confusing when trying to relate these data to the frequency data; the author himself noted, however, "Given the variables considered, the amount of any population increase or decrease is difficult, if not impossible, to correlate."

Perhaps the most interesting information to be gleaned from the comparison of the two projects is potential range shifts that occurred during the 17-year interim between the projects. A total of 15 species showed notable directional range shifts and it is probably no surprise to readers that all but one were northward; Cordilleran Flycatcher shifted eastward in its Pine Ridge range. Of the other 14, I consider most noteworthy for various reasons White-faced Ibis, Mississippi Kite, White-winged Dove, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Great-tailed Grackle, and Lesser Goldfinch. Mollhoff discusses the range shifts of these 15 species in the Species Accounts.

"Apparent population increases", as indicated by "frequency" in the 443 blocks, are interesting as well. Species that caught my eye are Greater Prairie-Chicken, Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Red-eyed Vireo, Tree Swallow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, and House Finch.

Perhaps of most concern to readers and those involved in conservation, and in my opinion the most important information provided by these atlases, are "apparent declines" in population. Thankfully, there are fewer species in this category than in the population increase group. Notable on this list are Gray Partridge (although this species is cyclic in population numbers), Loggerhead Shrike, Black-billed Cuckoo, and Black-billed Magpie. Mollhoff considers the last two species to be in what "appears to be a catastrophic decline". Mitigating this dim outlook, however, are three species that are now breeding in Nebraska after 100-year absences: Sandhill Crane, Marbled Godwit, and Pileated Woodpecker.

Finally, the meat of the book, the Species Accounts. Of course, the two maps and the comparative analysis between atlas efforts included in each Species Account are the key data points. Mollhoff ably discusses the status of each species as indicated by the maps and the various numerical comparisons between the two projects discussed above. Mollhoff uses BBS data to supplement the map data and comparisons; in most cases this is useful despite significant, perhaps statistically insurmountable, differences in protocol between atlas and BBS data. There is additional information on patch size, habitat, and breeding phenology for each species based on data recorded by the field observers. I found this information interesting and useful, perhaps most importantly as base information for further studies.

In summary, the Second Atlas, taken in conjunction with the First Atlas, provides a fascinating and informative picture of the status of Nebraska's breeding birds. It reflects the author's long experience and extensive knowledge, and should be on the bookshelves of biologists, land managers, landowners, and amateur ornithologists ("birders") working within the State of Nebraska.